Technology, Environment and Forests. A Bill to amend the Designs Act, 1911 has already been passed by the Rajya Sabha in the Winter Session, 1999.

Increase in imports/exports

298. SHRI VEDPRAKASH P. GOYAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether imports/exports have shown rising trend during the last six months;

(b) if so, the extent of increase; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to curb imports and increase exports?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. As per the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics provisional data, the exports have increased to US $ 27419.23 million during April—Dec. 1999 from US $ 24279.08 million during the same period last year registering an increase of 12.93%. Imports have also increased to US $ 34457.91 million during April—Dec. 1999 from US $ 31607.50 million during 1998-99 showing an increase of 9.02%.

(c) A large portion of our imports are necessary to sustain economic growth. A number of steps have been taken to accelerate exports which include reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation, simplification of procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions.

WTO negotiations on services and farm produce tariff

299. SHRI VAYALAR RAVI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether WTO propose to reopen the negotiations on services and farm produces tariff;

(b) Whether Government agreed for another round of negotiations on these issues; and

(c) if so, the reasons therefore and the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) The Negotiations on Services and Agriculture are mandated negotiations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) which are part of the WTO Agreements

signed at Marrakesh after the Uruguay Round. These negotiations have accordingly commenced from 1.1.2000.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

New Legislation for Utilisation of India's Bio-Diversity

300. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that the 15th Law Commission has recommended a new legislation to ensure conservation and sustainable utilization of India's bio-diversity and to provide safeguards against theft of traditional knowledge of local communities;

(b) if so, whether a new legislation is likely to be introduced in Parliament during the ensuing Budget Session; and

(c) if answer to part (b) above be in the affirmative the salient features of the new legislation?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Yes Sir,

(b) and (c) In order to protect the bio-diversity of the country, the Government are formulating a legislation on bio-diversity with the broad objectives of conservation and sustainable utilization of bio-diversity and equitable sharing of benefits out of the use of biological resources.

Government's Intervention to help Tobacco Dealers

301. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Tobacco manufacturers are not purchasing stocks at competitive price from certain districts like Prakasam and Guntur in Andhra Pradesh; and

(b) if so, the steps proposed to intervene in the matter and facilitate export of the stocks to Russia to help Tobacco dealers?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Purchase of tobacco stocks from growers at auction platforms of Andhra Pradesh have just commenced on 22nd Feb, 2000 and is yet to gain its momentum in the ensuing auction season.

(b) As the bulk of tobacco exports are against rupee payment by Russia, the Government of India have asked the Russian Authorities to allocate sufficient